

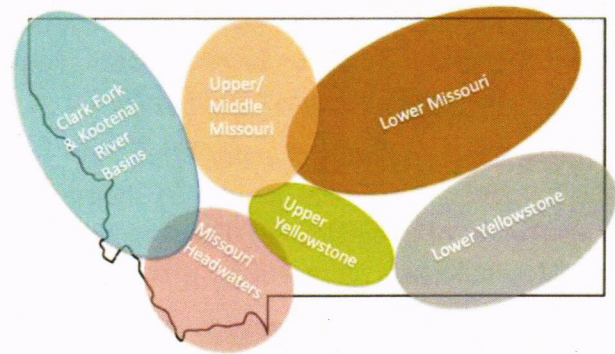
## Regional Watershed Coordination in Montana

### Overview:

By the late 1990s, Montana began formalizing a vision for localized natural resource management. Communities were organizing themselves based on local hydrology, or watershed boundaries, to collectively solve their natural resource challenges. State and Federal managers quickly recognized the value of local leaders convening stakeholders to collaborate, find common ground and implement projects to improve their watershed communities. Local coordinators also provide the venue for agencies to participate in the process, effectively leveraging multiple resources to meet multiple objectives.

The Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) was formed in conjunction with a memo issued by Governor Racicot in 1995 recognizing that (1) sustaining our watersheds and ecosystems will provide lasting benefits only if constructed through collaborative, cooperative process which depends upon the active involvement, insight and support of local residents, and (2) to create a more efficient system of cooperation and coordination among natural resource governmental agencies and organizations in Montana.” Twenty-three different state and federal agencies supported the memo as signatories.

Since that time, over 60 watershed groups have formed and MWCC has continued to connect the individual watershed groups to agencies, funders and one another. Building on the success of the local planning efforts, it is time to “scale up” the coordination and networking efforts across regions, or watershed basins, to connect larger landscapes, watersheds and their communities. Recently, MWCC has helped coordinate three regional entities at varying levels of capacity. The following map is demonstrative of the regional coordination MWCC has observed. In some areas, regional entities have formed and requested assistance from MWCC. These include the Upper Yellowstone River Steering Committee, Missouri Headwaters Partnership, and the Clark Fork and Kootenai River Basins Council. In other areas, local groups and conservation district councils are serving the role of regional coordination in some fashion.



### Regional Coordination Characteristics:

Broad stakeholder engagement and inclusivity; community leadership; local and state government planning and technical assistance; regional coordination commitment; and need for coordination capacity.

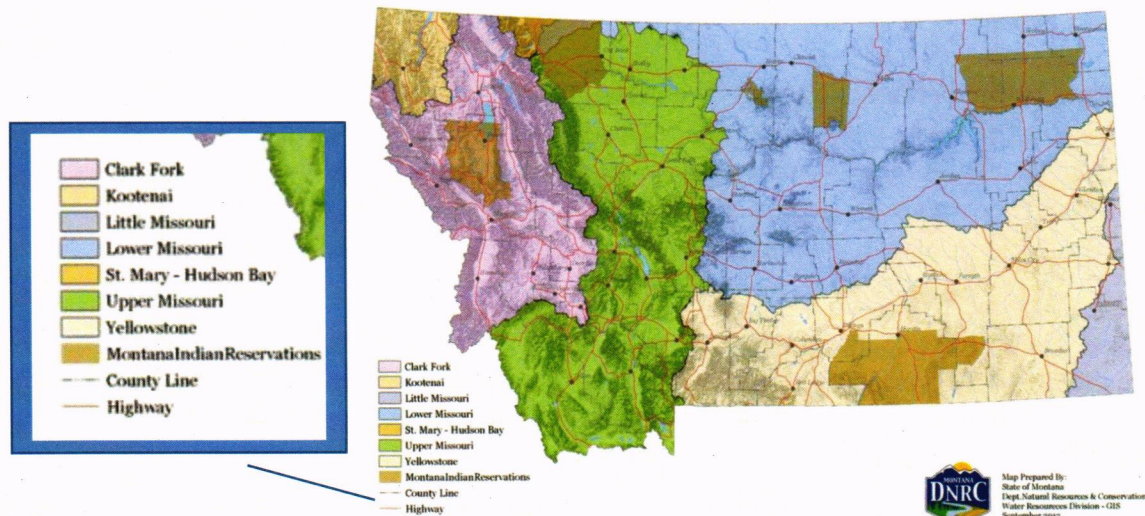
**Key Partners:** Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and Dept. of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP), conservation districts, conservation district councils, local watershed groups and stakeholders, and private investors.

#### Goals:

1. Increase awareness and recognition of grassroots conservation in Montana.
2. Reduce bureaucracy and leverage public and private funding for success in localized natural resource management.
3. Increase financial and technical support for local and regional watershed coordination.
4. Align local conservation activities with implementation of the State Water Plan, Integrated Water Quality Plan, as well as other state and regional initiatives.

#### MWCC Strategies:

- Track regional coordination efforts.
- Assist in identifying geographic watershed regions
- Support existing partnerships as needed: fiscal sponsorship, direct coordination services, and/or fundraising and development.
- Explore a statewide model for replication and sustainability of regional stakeholder coordination.
- Work with the Montana Water Policy Interim committee to recognize, support, and advance watershed coordination.



Pictured Above: "Major Water Planning Basins" identified by DNRC for the 2015 State Water Plan.

### Overview of existing Montana Regional Entities:

#### *Upper Yellowstone River Steering Committee*

The Yellowstone River Symposium on Thursday, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017 brought together stakeholders, in part as a response to the die off of Mountain Whitefish in 2016 and a larger conversation about potential threats and issues facing the Yellowstone River. The desire to maintain momentum and continue a partnership and collaboration among community and key stakeholders led to the development of the Upper Yellowstone Ad-Hoc Steering Committee. More information: <http://montanaaquaticresources.org/events/>

#### *Missouri Headwaters Partnership (MHP)*

MHP is a group of nine locally-based watershed groups and conservation districts in the Upper Missouri watershed basin (north of Three Forks) and located along the High Divide. Each group of the MHP acts to bring together multiple stakeholders for conservation efforts across the Upper Missouri Basin. The current MHP coordinator is Jen Downing, [jdowning@bhwc.org](mailto:jdowning@bhwc.org).

#### *Clark Fork and Kootenai River Basins Council (CFKRBC)*

The 2001 Montana Legislature passed HB 397 to establish a Clark Fork River Basin Task Force (\$85-2-350) and authorized the Task Force to prepare a water management plan for the Clark Fork River Basin. After the completion of the Montana State Water Plan in 2015, funding was no longer available; however, there was an ongoing interest in and a need for a collaborative approach to watershed stewardship in the basin among the members. In 2017, with the help of MWCC and the Bonneville Environmental Foundation, stakeholders created a new coordinating entity, now known as the Clark Fork and Kootenai River Basins Council. More information is available here: <http://mtwatersheds.org/app/clark-fork-basin-council/>

#### *Missouri & Yellowstone River Conservation Districts Councils (MRCDC & YRCDC)*

At the turn of the millennium, these entities were created in response to a need for greater coordination along the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers. Each council is comprised of conservation district supervisors within their defined region. Each group has engaged in broader stakeholder engagement activities through scientific research and on the ground projects. More information on YRCDC: <http://yellowstonerivercouncil.org> and MRCDC: <http://missouririvercouncil.info/>

### Other state models for supporting local watershed groups:

Colorado Basin Roundtables: <http://cwcb.state.co.us/water-management/basin-roundtables/Pages/main.aspx>

Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative: <https://wri.utah.gov/wri>

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board: <http://www.oregon.gov/oweb/Pages/index.aspx>

